(b) if so, whether Government have worked out any strategy to boost trade with Nepal and also increase investment there; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Both Governments hold frequent mutual consultations at various levels on measures to promote bilateral trade and investment.

Units for Gold Jewellery Manufacture set-up by MMTC

*657. SHRI RAHASBIHARI BARIK: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether MMTC has entered into gold jewellery manufacture in a big way;

(b) if so, the number of units proposed to be set up by MMTC for this purpose;

(c) the total amount of investment proposed to be made by MMTC in each of these units;

(d) whether it is a part of MMTC's diversification programme; and

(e) the details of the other areas where MMTC proposes to start its business?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) No, Sir.

(b) to (d) Do not arise.

(e) MMTC has entered into Joint Ventures in areas such as aquaculture (marine products) and agro products and also proposes to diversify in areas such as jewellery, textiles, trade related infrastructure etc.

Wage Settlement between ITPO and Employees Union

*658. SHRI YERRA NARAYANASWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether a wage settlement has been arrived at between ITPO and the Employees Union;

(b) whether service conditions and harmonious relations between management and employees and officers was also discussed; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir.

(c) A wage revision settlement defining scope and coverage, period of the agreement, minimum wages, pay scales, allowances, advances, medical expenses, discipline & punctuality, productivity and harmonious industrial relations, implementation aspects etc. has been signed between ITPO management and ITPO (ex-TFAI) Employees Union on 24-4-95.

Failure in producing good quality Coal

*659. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA: Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India has totally failed in producing good quality coal;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether one of the reasons is lack of commitment of top management to work at area/mine leves;

(d) whether Government would consider involvement of a team of retired eminent Mining Engineers who could be entrusted with the task of improving the quality of coal by changing of mining method in opencast mining and underground mining;

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) and (e) Modernisation of mining methods (opencast or underground) including improvement of coal quality is a continuous process. This is receiving due attention of the coal industry. Coal industry can consult national as well as international experts|institutions on specific issues, as may be necessary.

Dependence of balance of payments on export performance

*660. DR. B. B. DUTTA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that balance of payments continues to depend crucially on export performance; and

(b) if so, steps taken by Government recently to maintain a strong export growth?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Recognising that international trade is a key component of global economic activity today, the Government have taken a number of steps to encourage and maintain strong export growth. India's trade policy was liberalised in July 1991 to respond to the opportunities and challenges posed by the domestic and international developmeants and coninuously revised thereafter to step up exports. The trade policy liberalised as of 31.3.1995 has aimed at creating a free environment for trade, strengthening the export promotion structure, removing procedural irritants through simplification and streamlning of procedures, increasing export production, improving efficiency and sharpening competitive edge, facilitating input availability, focussing on quality technological upgradation besides introducing and strengthening schemes for export promotion. Efforts have been made to provide cheaper export credit and provide tax exemption on export profits. Export promotion is a continuous process and steps are taken to boost exports in consultation with trade, industry and concerned institutions.

Losses incurred by consumer cooperative societies and wholesale central stores

6720. SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA: Will the Minister of CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that 50 per cent of the primary consumer cooperative societies and wholesale central stores of the country at present are incurring losses;

(b) whether non-supply of essential items or delayed supply are the main reasons for the losses;

(c) if so, the steps Government propose to take to avoid losses on this count; and

(d) what other steps are under consideration of Government to popularise these stores?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI BUTA SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The main reasons for losses are lack of members participation, lack of democratic functioning, lack of professional management, unplanned business operations, etc. as per the findings of the Expert Committee which was set up to look into the working of consumer cooperatives.

(c) and (d) The Expert Committee which was set up to look into the working of consumer cooperatives has submitted the report on 10th April, 1995. The salient recommendations of the Committee are as follows:—